

## **‘He’s ... *making* our North’: Affective engagements with place in David Hockney’s landscapes from ‘A Bigger Picture’**

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### **Abstract:**

David Hockney is one of Britain’s most popular living artists. His one-man show ‘A Bigger Picture’ opened in Spring 2012 at the RCA to a record number of visitors. Hockney’s decision to illuminate a relatively unknown corner of Britain, the Wolds of East Yorkshire, prompted a mixed critical response. This article however, is focused on findings from an empirical study based on how people from Yorkshire respond to Hockney’s suite of works. Concerned to chart the source and fluidity of the agency the people of the study gave to their engagements with Hockney, the piece draws on Alfred’s Gell’s notion of ‘art-like relations’ as a means of identifying what people respond to in his landscapes. Concerned with representational depictions of place in Hockney’s work the piece shows that people used Hockney to transform pejorative associations of the North. The gallery and the home as consumption sites were considered using a more-than-representational approach; this enabled a consideration of affective, embodied and routine practices of response beyond the visual. The study shows that the home provided a more relaxed, intimate space for engagement, where framed prints enabled people to reclaim Hockney’s landscapes almost as a form of kinship.

**Keywords:** David Hockney, landscape, the North, art engagement, more-than-representational theory, art kinship.

People like pictures of places, things and events which, for various reasons are significant to them.<sup>1</sup>

What Hockney did for me was to validate what I’ve always loved. I used to go into ecstasy in the Wolds, so for *him* to see these and decide to paint them,

and to live in this part of the world, after he's been around all these famous places... (Celia)

## **Introduction**

Since Lucien Freud's death in 2012, David Hockney has been described as one of the most popular British living painters.<sup>2</sup> His exhibition *David Hockney RA: A Bigger Picture* shown at the Royal Academy of Arts from January to April 2012 was comprised mostly of works made in the last eight years: landscapes of his native East Yorkshire. Critics were staunchly divided about the exhibition: Craig Raine described his iPad prints as 'ravishing'<sup>3</sup> but for Adrian Searle, his foray in to landscape was a risky re-invention, much of it 'mucky, chancy English landscape painting that is already ubiquitous'.<sup>4</sup> Some of the responses were made in relation to the spectacular form that both Hockney's works and the organisation of the exhibition took: critics were astonished by the gargantuan size of the paintings, some of which stood 15 metres wide and by the sheer number of works, which numbered 150 per room, testimony to the extraordinary energies of an artist of later years. But there was something else about these rural images of East Yorkshire and of the North: these paintings were stirring an affective response that engaged a particular set of feelings. Paul Morley, an avowedly northern cultural commentator, speaking on the *The Late Review* described feeling 'moved to tears' as he entered the gallery.<sup>5</sup> For me the rush of emotion Morley had felt came as no surprise. My first view of these paintings was televisual. In 2010 when Alan Yentob's *Imagine* (BBC2,) series screened Bruno Wollheim's documentary *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* (2009)<sup>6</sup> which chronicles Hockney painting the landscapes of the Wolds, there came a moment when the television screen, in crisp HD, was dominated with spectacular fades from May to December of the 2006 *Woldgate Woods* series. I had found myself alone in my living room feeling incredibly moved by the beauty and atmosphere of Hockney's vision of the East Wolds and it was then that I decided to research how other people from Yorkshire respond to his work. This article explores the rich and complex ways in which people engage with David Hockney's landscape paintings.

Described broadly, the people I spoke to responded to Hockney as an artist, his art works and the places and things depicted in the art works. Given that this article explores engagements with art about place and how peoples' identities and feelings are at stake in artistic representations, I situate the engagements I explore by fleshing out the specificity of the Wolds in East Yorkshire and how they are placed contextually in the North of Britain. Concerned with how the North is positioned within British culture and with the relationship between Hockney's work, peoples' sense of place and their feelings about where they are located in the national imaginary, I then map out the context from which the people of the study speak.

Arguably Hockney's recent landscape work has increased his popularity among an international public. The Royal Academy exhibition, *David Hockney RA: A Bigger Picture* which ran in Spring 2012, was the fifth most popular exhibition in the world in 2012.<sup>7</sup> It had 7,500 daily visitors; and a 'phenomenal' 600,000 people saw it regardless of the £14.00

ticket price for non-Academy members.<sup>8</sup> However, it is important to note this extremely popular exhibition exposed an area, the East Wolds, which is relatively unknown, even to people from Yorkshire. It is probably *terra incognita* for the rest of Britain. Indeed for the unfamiliar reader, the Yorkshire Wolds is an area of quiet, unmarred scenery made up of rolling chalk hills and valleys. Placed south of the North York Moors, it stretches from Flamborough, west to Malton then south to the Humber bridge. Dotted through with market towns, such as Howden, Driffield and Pocklington and country houses such as the Elizabethan country house Burton Agnes, it is known also for its unspoilt coastline. Relatively flat and unpeopled, East Yorkshire tourist literature anticipates that people will think of the Cotswolds rather than the East Wolds and the tourist is encouraged to visit magnificent, quiet countryside. Its somewhat hidden identity has an historical root for, as David Neave (1998) argues, the East Riding and the East Wolds have a history of being culturally separate from the rest of Yorkshire: a sense of an East Riding identity began to be noticeable in the 1760s in parliamentary documents and in 1768 an East Riding Agricultural Society was set up. But Neave argues that by the early twentieth century its people must have felt a sense of isolation from the rest of Yorkshire; they had a separate administration and were isolated from what had become the 'new heart of Yorkshire, the industrial West Riding'.<sup>9</sup> Physically isolated, Neave also notes that culturally the architecture of the East is plain and austere and its landscape created largely in the Georgian period, while being one of the most totally rural areas in England, has what J. B. Priestley described in the 1930s as a, 'pleasant remoteness of its own'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed this is why the official tourist board 'Yorkshire Forward' have embraced Hockney so forcefully: his work has enabled them to unpeel an entirely new frontier of cultural tourism.

I began to interview the people of this study in May 2012. I interviewed 15 people using semi-structured interviews using the 'A Bigger Picture' exhibition catalogue as a visual stimulus for discussion (see **Appendix 1**). Significantly for a study about landscape in the Wolds, two of the respondents were born in East Yorkshire and four had parents or friends from what used to be termed the East Riding. The rest bar three were born in and currently reside in the place where the research was conducted: West Yorkshire. The sample is white with one Anglo-Indian: eleven are female, four are male. Their ages range from 23-76. Most are educated professional people; the visual and cultural literacy of the respondents provided them with the resources to respond. The interviews were loose conversational encounters: I asked about their views of Hockney as artist, about their responses to his landscape painting and about where they consumed and viewed his work. Pseudonyms act here to protect the identities of the respondents. This qualitative study makes no broad representative claims but it chronicles a rich illustration of the shapes of meaning attached to the dynamic inter-change as people engage with Hockney's landscapes.

### **David Hockney**

Born in Bradford, West Yorkshire in 1937, Hockney completed his art foundation at Bradford College and during this period he painted ordinary working-class leisure and domestic

scenes: the launderette, pub and fish and chip shop. The street scene depicted in *Bolton Junction, Eccleshill* (1956) is typical of this period and several of these works are permanently exhibited at Cartwright Hall in Bradford. He subsequently studied at the Royal College of Art, London, 1959-1962. In the early to mid-sixties, magazine and press articles testify that Hockney was adroit at self-promotion, managing his lifestyle image both as eccentric, fashionable young artist in Swinging London and as a 'clowning', disrespectful iconoclast prepared to use homoerotic materials as a means of flouting academic boundaries.<sup>11</sup> Hockney enjoyed a rare status as an exotically different northern outsider in the upper and upper-middle class milieu of the London scene.<sup>12</sup> He arrived at a time when metropolitan culture fetishised images of the northern working-class, especially those from British New Wave cinema.<sup>13</sup> It was attractive to be a northerner against London's urbane backcloth. As Simon Faulkner points out, Hockney's 'northern working-class origins marked him out as a site of contradiction';<sup>14</sup> signs of his homosexuality, his bleached blond hair for example, could not be associated with traditional images of working-class masculinity, of say mining. In this way, Hockney presented, and still does, an important counter-balance to the uber-masculinity at times fastened to the North. Yet, for the newly mixed class constituency of London's fashionable boutiques, clubs and restaurants his celebrity persona as Pop Artist and colourfully ostentatious member of young London who was prepared to make 'humorous comments at the expense of "grey" Britain'<sup>15</sup> in the flat vowels of a Bradford accent, marked Hockney as a desirable anti-Establishment figure. Having garnered some notoriety amid the celebrity culture of publicity as a part of the 'youth boom' constructed by the mass media in Britain, Hockney made his first foray in to the United States. After a visit to LA in 1964, the city became a meaningful site for the artist and by the end of that decade he began to be strongly associated with Southern California.<sup>16</sup> It is this period, with which Hockney is most popularly associated: his 'stylized Southern California landscapes'<sup>17</sup>, and the swimming-pool paintings which openly investigate homoerotic pleasure and love.

Hockney's paintings of LA show that Hockney's oeuvre contains strands concerned with affection for place. There are the early pieces about Bradford, then in 1997 he chose to move to the Yorkshire east coast from the American west to make Britain the concern of his work. Accounts of Hockney during this period stress the affective reasons for his move back to Bradford.<sup>18</sup> He returned to Britain in the late 1990s, when his close friend Jonathan Silver began to die in the later stages of cancer. Silver, Bradfordian entrepreneur, bought the abandoned textile Mill, built and owned by Sir Titus Salt, the 19th century industrialist who also philanthropically built Saltaire model village to house his workers (though Salt is equally regarded by sociologists as a fearful regulator of his working-class workers).<sup>19</sup> Re-opened in November 1987, 'Salts Mill' is a regenerated hub of local commerce and culture, housing shops, local businesses and 'Gallery 1853', the largest permanent collection of Hockney's work. Unlike a conventional gallery setting, Hockney's works are threaded through shopping areas, such that one can look at a series of works on the ground floor of the building, while looking at art books and artists' materials for sale. There is also an outlet where prints of Hockney's work are sold to the public; a process of popular dissemination of which Hockney

is known to approve: 'I'm sympathetic to his way [Jonathan Silver] of showing paintings and drawings that aren't for sale except as posters and postcards, so people aren't intimidated by what something is worth'.<sup>20</sup> Salts Mill is an international heritage site and an important tourist attraction with its hybrid gallery spaces: it houses the paintings which document the drives from Bridlington and through the Wolds to see his dying friend Silver, paintings which are the precursors to the work which begins in 2003 forming the period of landscape works for 'A Bigger Picture'. Pieces which, one might argue, attach the site to its local backcloth with a unique sense of place.

### **Landscape, place-image and the north**

As a means of illustrating the context of Hockney's reception, I want argue that landscape imagery was enjoying particular attention across related visual media in the early 2000s in Britain. Hockney's landscapes must be understood as being made and viewed at a moment of wider media and cultural excitement in the genre. Helen Wheatley charts half a decade of 'rural imagery on British television, a veritable feast of rolling hills and dramatic coastline', which peaked to saturation point in the television schedule in 2007.<sup>21</sup> Programmes such as *Coast* (The Open University/BBC, 2005 -), obsessed with finding a 'perfect view' offer what she terms 'spectacular television'.<sup>22</sup> A national televisual 'turn' to landscape arguably provides an atmosphere which levels down the hallowed practice of viewing fine art, warming the public gaze to Hockney's painterly ruralscapes. Moreover, drawing on Debbie Rodan,<sup>23</sup> Wheatley also notes design changes in television as object which usher a blurring of the boundary between domestically consumed media forms such as television and 'art': when flat, HD-ready, wall-hanging screens coupled with the possibility of an add-on frame gave the set the appearance of fine art in the living room with the predominance of landscape imagery, television is appreciated as 'popular ambient art'.<sup>24</sup> Sumptuous landscape was being televised during this period and it potentially warmed the public to Hockney's new portfolio of East Yorkshire scenes.

Landscape painting has since the fifteenth century been thought of as a 'mass' art form, thought to be more suited to pleasuring the eye as opposed to the intellect, though as Norbert Wolf concedes, it is a genre which has enjoyed burgeoning popularity amongst publics ever since.<sup>25</sup> Ideas of what constitutes a tasteful, aesthetic version of landscape are subject to historical change. Landscape imagery has been used to produce a specific 'place-image'<sup>26</sup> of regions in Britain; see Rachel Moseley on the role of the television adaptation of Winston Graham's *Poldark* novels (1975, 1977) in generating a wild, romantic and passionate view of Cornwall.<sup>27</sup> And clearly there remains a thirst for gorgeous images of landscape given the recent remake of *Poldark* (BBC, 2015), this time shot in HD with its stunningly clear and detailed images of the Cornish coastline. Landscape photography has long been used in holiday brochures to stand as 'national iconography' to present Britain at home and abroad, though it is, 'insistently presented as the landscape of southern England (as against the North, or even Wales)'.<sup>28</sup> Landscape offers its viewers deeply gratifying aesthetic pleasures but the idea of landscape has historically been a site of competing

claims and values. Such that while Cornwall is presented as a place of desire, the problem the North faces is that it has a history of denigration. As scholars on the place of the North in national culture demonstrate, there is a historical genealogy of ideas, stretching as far back as the twelfth century which represent it as marginal and inferior.<sup>29</sup> Russell's historical analysis of travel literature is germane for understanding how the North was ranked in terms of its desirability alongside other English regional sites. The seven counties of the North are 'generally secondary' in guides of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and in the *Fodor Guide* 2000, only York and the Lake District feature in its recommended British tour. The literary tours of H.V. Morton in the late 1920s Stephen Kohl argues, present the north as a morally 'fallen England'; a place where the landscape is un-English.<sup>30</sup> Indeed Kohl suggests that the idea of 'Northern-England' is an oxymoron - so powerful is the association of the beauty of rural England with the Southern home counties. J. B. Priestley in *English Journey* (1934) finds the north sad, ugly and depressing.<sup>31</sup>

In the sections that follow, I present the voices of the people who shared their responses to Hockney with me. I argue that thinking about and looking at works by Hockney augmented changes in the thoughts and feelings of the participants. Firstly, engaging with Hockney transformed the reputation of the place in which they live. People responded to Hockney as artist, his works and the places depicted in the works, often in inter-connected ways. In order to pin down the intricacy of what people responded to, I use Alfred Gell's vocabulary from *Art and Agency* to discuss what happens around Hockney's works of art. Through this process I trace where agency lies in the engagement process for the respondents. As Shari Sabeti argues in her work on the pedagogical use of art objects as inspiration for creative writing groups in a museum context, agency is often overwhelmingly assumed to be uni-directional: the artwork acts on the responding person.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on Gell, I trace more complex sources of agency, some of which can be identified before the art work is encountered. Rejecting a semiotic approach in favour of an 'action-centred' anthropological approach, 'because it is pre-occupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process',<sup>33</sup> Gell argues that art objects can act like 'persons' that possess the agency to augment change in the world. For Gell the significance of an art object lies not in its aesthetic value, or with its status in cultural or institutional terms, but rather in the 'art-like relations' that exist around it. Gell maps out a schema of terms with which to describe the nexus of relations: *index* which is the artwork; *artist* to whom the art work is connected; and *recipient* or those to whom the index extends agency. Gell's terms can exist in either 'agent' or 'patient' terms: the 'agent' acts on others; while the 'patient' is acted upon. For example as Gell argues, 'the material index dictates to the artist, who responds as 'patient' to its inherent agency',<sup>34</sup> or an index can be placed in to the patient role if for example a painting is vandalized or defaced. For Gell an art-like relation is activated when the index stimulates a cognitive happening which Gell calls an 'abduction of agency'. As James Leach explains: 'An index is a sign from which a 'causal inference' can be drawn,' thus smoke infers fire; a smile indicates friendliness. This is abduction – a process based on, 'a combination of a causal inference and a representational inference.'<sup>35</sup> While

Gell's theory edges away from the representational as Leach maintains, 'Objects are not representations, not vehicles for symbols in this theory'; it is in their social relations where they have their effect.<sup>36</sup> The terms of this schema map the 'art nexus' with the potential to operate highly sophisticated agent-patient relations at various levels. In Gell's terms in relation to this study, there is one *artist* (Hockney); a number of in *indexes* (pieces part of the oeuvre of works from 'The Bigger Picture'); and several *prototypes* (the places and entities represented in the works) and a group of *recipients* (the group members I individually interviewed). There are spatial and temporal points to bear in mind in terms of where and when the works were viewed. Some of the people I interviewed talked retrospectively about their experience of viewing the works in a gallery setting at the exhibition at the Royal Academy, some responded there and then in the interview encounters (at times in conversation without necessarily looking at the works in the exhibition catalogue; at others in direct response to them), while others referred out to works they 'owned' in the form of framed reproductions or book illustrations they had at home. In the following section I use Gell's terms to trace how Hockney changed the place-image of their county in the North.

### **Connections to the East: what Hockney's Wolds landscapes meant**

The East Riding has a distinctive cultural, economic and physical identity which though not strictly confined by the riding's physical boundaries justifies it being studied as a separate entity to the rest of Yorkshire.<sup>37</sup>

For some people in the study and drawing on Gell's terms, the artist or the index did offer the first point in the flow of agency or engagement. While most of the people of the study were born and lived in West Yorkshire, there was a recognition that Hockney's decision to paint the East Wolds brought something new to the English tradition of landscape painting. Hockney was unraveling a new part of Yorkshire for the delectation of a British art audience. Peter, himself a local artist and director of his local Arts Centre, held the conviction that Hockney was making a bold move to insert the East in to the landscape tradition:

He's done the East Wolds in his recent work and, I think he's actually said this himself, he's put East Yorkshire on the map. As far as artists were concerned, it was an area that people didn't go to, because it was fairly ordinary. But what Hockney is doing is saying 'Well it is an ordinary landscape, but *look* and see it.' He then makes it extraordinary: by how he picks out the shadows and the decorative bits, the shapes. He takes a small subject and says *look at this* – like his *Trees Near Warter* for example.

Here Peter refers to an artwork by Hockney to reveal his sense that the artist was concerned with opening up an under-represented, mundane landscape with a view to reversing the

hum-drum by releasing its creative potential for the spectacular. He then melds this with his own knowledge of the British tradition of landscape painters. He went on:

I mean some of these scenes, like the tunneled one particularly – these compositions, are similar ones by Graham Sutherland, which he did in Pembrokeshire ... like John Piper, Ivon Hitchens too. Well Hockney is proving he's the current end of the English landscape chain which if you go back, has Turner and Constable in it.

And for Peter, the recent Wolds works hold a contrast to his earlier oeuvre. There is also a recognition that these works attempt to capture something very particular to the light in the Wolds, so that in this response Peter, using his knowledge of place appreciates the likeness to the prototype, here skillfully captured by Hockney:

When he was a student, the palette there is very much of its period. Browns, greys, drab kitchen-sink stuff that seemed to be popular then. But he was right – it *was* drab. What's happened is that his palette has brightened – and East Riding, the light is different. I think his work has an element of playing with light. Paintings of the tunnel in different light.

But in other cases agency could be sourced as emerging out of peoples' existing social and affective familial connections. For Claudia her father's ownership of a print of Hockney's depiction of the Wolds generated a desire to engage with Hockney. She was born in Beverley, her father was born in Hull and she associates her mother as being strongly connected to the area. Her curiosity about Hockney and her motivation to engage with his works comes primarily out of her parental connections: 'I'd never really thought about his landscape work, but when I thought of it my dad had a print of his of the East Yorkshire landscapes at home. So I knew that my dad was interested as well, which made Hockney more interesting to me.' Claudia now works in Leeds:

Just knowing they are from my homeland makes me like them. I'm older now and I don't live there. But when I go back, I tend to explore more than I used to when I lived there. All those places are strongly connected to my mum, who is more of that area. So whenever I come home, we'll go to Bridlington and Burton Agnes, all those sorts of areas that Hockney paints. And everywhere seems more pretty. It is very different to Leeds. We've got the seaside. Lots of seagulls and different wildlife. The pelican is very East Yorkshire. In Hockney's paintings there's lots of green and distant landscapes; they're colourful and bright, so there's a nice positive feel about them.



It was also the case in my interviews that familial and friendship attachments to the East landscape were carried down and through the engagements people made with particular works. As David looked at *The Road to Sledmere* he moved through a number of participatory stages:

I know the Wolds. My dad has told me about those places because he's from Scarborough and he knows the Wolds better than I do. Particularly Sledmere. Yeah, he talks a lot about Sledmere. I've passed through it. My dad talks a lot about that picture and what Sledmere's like. I've read quite a few things about the Wolds – a lot of people saying it's like a forgotten area of Yorkshire. Not many people have heard of it or visit it as a landscape. It's a really beautiful place and it's important to have a record of that as a picture. There are a lot of traditional places in Yorkshire that people might like to paint like Ilkley and all the other more famous landscapes whereas it's an obscure place, but because Hockney's done it, it means a lot more people will pay attention to it.

David is taken to his engagement with both place and with the painting through his knowledge of his father's ties to both Sledmere and to Hockney's depiction of the place. To mark the importance of that place for wider dissemination through index and artist is significant to David. When Sharon visited 'The Bigger Picture' exhibition, she was accompanied with her friend who was born in Beverley but who had moved to Canada. Note in this response that Nick was motivated before he gets to the works themselves by knowledge and experience of place. Then standing in the gallery in front of them prompts an intense commune with the works. The pieces become a puzzle as he tries to match the prototypes of the works to his biographical ties to places he has lived in and travelled to; the paintings evoke personal memories of experiences of being with family members.

He was motivated by thinking he'd know some of the places. When we got there he kept saying I'm sure these are areas I recognize, being from East Yorkshire. He seemed to remember the Bridlington parts, bits about his childhood, his grandma. Then he spent quite a while in front of the tree tunnel, telling me how he thought he knew it from when he used to travel to his dad's house, on the East Coast. Then he was convinced that one of the houses they'd lived in, his old house – which wasn't depicted – was caught in the folds of one of the paintings. That meant quite a lot to him.

For others the East signified a place of past holidays from the industrial West and evoked special childhood memories. Many of my respondents knew about Hockney's life, and at times details of his life would be threaded through our interview, in a way that seems to offer them pleasure. As Celia, David's mother told me, 'I'm so overjoyed that he's come back

- and it's the *Yorkshire* landscape that he's captured.' Celia offered this response before we looked at any of Hockney's works:

I'm more overjoyed because as a child, we always went to Bridlington on holiday. Well, Hockney's mother retired there, and his sister and now he lives there. I have always loved Bridlington – not just because of those feelings and associations with holidays, but the drive to get there. As a child, I used to sit there and look out at the landscape, at the world, and I loved it. I used to drink it in, it was as much a part of the holiday just getting there. I love that landscape. Even before Hockney started the Wolds, I loved those places. I remember Hockney saying when he was in the USA how he loved the skies, the big skies. Well, the Wolds are big skies as well.

For Celia, reading Hockney's paintings is intimately entangled and as her response below shows heavily laden with her own felt experience of the environment of the Yorkshire Wolds. As we worked through the images of the Hockney exhibition catalogue from *A Bigger Picture* we came across the tunnels paintings. Celia starts with Hockney only to journey off in to her own memories:

Lisa: Then there are the tunnel paintings [turning to *Late Spring Tunnel, May, 2006*]

Celia: To me, that is very personal, because we'd drive down a track like that and have a picnic. My childhood was turning off the road and turning down tracks like that. So maybe this is an added thing for me personally. It's like stepping back. He's captured that so beautifully.

Lisa: there's a sense of intrigue

Celia: and there's something secret about it. You're there, and it's drawing you in; into its beauty. To me, coming from industrial Hunslet, you could escape on the tram into Middleton Woods, but you were still aware ... whereas in the Wolds, you just look across and it's beauty. There isn't a town or a village. It's just there, this loveliness, without a factory, or a little village. You can just drink it in.

In these exchanges, Hockney adds something fresh for the people of the study, they contribute to our national knowledge about the North and contests its reputation as an ugly, depressing place.

### **Hockney's validation of Yorkshire and the North**

The North of England evokes a greater sense of identity than any other 'region' of the country. At the same time it provokes the most derision and

rejection from those whose identity has been constructed and shaped elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

While some of the people of the study acknowledged that Hockney's East Wolds landscapes stood out as fresh depictions of a hidden place, Hockney as artist stood as an index of Yorkshire and by extension of the north and this evoked fiercely expressed feelings of pride. Arguably, Hockney's earlier life and its associations with artistic celebrity, colourful ostentation and metropolitan hedonism lend particular meaning to his choice to return to East Yorkshire in 2003. Some of them expressed this affectionately using a term - often associated with boisterous, youthful and macho masculinity - from the local vernacular: 'I feel proud of David Hockney being a Bradford lad, yes' Peter told me. And Celia said to me, 'having done all of that, all of the gay thing, he finally ends up back in Yorkshire. The Yorkshire lad again'. Indeed, the idea of Hockney's return to Yorkshire was especially emotionally resonant. 'I'm so overjoyed he's come back.' And Sula said, 'he did a lot of work in America, but there's this pride in him coming back here at the end of his life.' As Shelly said, 'I like the fact that he's gone and he's come back'. Celia's son David feels a closeness through his appreciation that places Hockney on a level with those who view his work, 'He's one of us, he never forgets that. He hasn't grown up here and moved away and sort of looking back on it as though it's part of his past, it's still his present.' I would argue that the notion of Hockney's return from the glamour of LA or London as the metropolitan 'centre' of his latest oeuvre, has a doubly powerful emotional impetus for my respondents because it legitimates and values a place which they feel has been denigrated and deemed secondary in the popular national imaginary. Olivia, a student at a London University told me: 'I was seeing this guy and when I told him I was from the north he said, 'but it's awful up there, isn't it?' And when Sharon socialises in London, 'being northern,' she told me, 'can be a hindrance'. Being a novelty, as Sharon went on to illustrate comes partly from being judged by regional accent. On the occasion she was meeting her friend to see the Hockney *Bigger Picture* exhibition:

The guy I went to this with was a parliamentary assistant in Westminster. So I'd go down there, meet all these bright young things, moving in political circles - and they just mimic you. They ask you what you do but all they pick up on is the accent, while I'm there wanting to talk about something interesting. I've actually got a brain.

The meaning of the northern dialect, has since the nineteenth century as Rawnsley argues, been associated with, 'not just provincialism, but also of a supposed culturally inferior people',<sup>39</sup> so one can hear Sharon's irritation and disappointment as she prepared to enjoy an culturally prestigious arts event, to be mocked and trivialised. Celia too referred to northerners as 'cultural underdogs' who needed the testimony of valued artistic production to culturally spiral them up. 'Us northerners - we are slightly flattened down' she told me. In

this instance we see how an artist operates in social relations outside the gallery or the exhibition catalogue. Through recounting her various conversations she'd had with her Southern neighbours, I noted how Hockney was used by Celia to valorise the North:

Celia: On our street where we live now, my daughter knows a couple who are professors and went to Oxford and Cambridge. And they're very [comedy posh accent] and when I'm with them, I always feel I end up making a case for us Northerners. And then one thing I drum on about to them is Hockney. 'You haven't got a Hockney!'

Lisa: Did you get into discussions with them about clashes of culture?

Celia: I was always aware, and was not going to be put down by these Southern intellectuals. But it did feel like that at times. But I could say 'But look at Hockney'. And they'd never realised how beautiful the North was. This is what he's doing, is Hockney, with these exhibitions, is *making* our North - which Southerners just think of as cloth caps and whippets. But it's not about that. We have all this beauty.

Indeed this was a tendency among my respondents: Hockney was used precisely in these types of encounters as a means of strenuously signposting the cultural contribution and status of Yorkshire.

Lisa: Is there a connection between identity and Hockney?

Sharon: Yes of course there is, because he's a shining light of this area and he's nationally and internationally recognised. So at least you have that to fall back on - like you can on other various people. That's what's very good about this county.

And as Celia said: 'Being a northerner, we sometimes feel like what we've got isn't good enough. Well he has said it *is* good enough. It's brilliant.' Yet while several respondents thought that Hockney's work and its images of Yorkshire landscape would act as a form of ambassadorship for the North, others - most especially respondents with an arts education - were more cynical:

Amanda: I don't think the Northern-ness is that important unless you are a Northern viewer and you connect to it in that way. Some of the viewers are probably meant to be Royal Academy. I don't think they're particularly interested that he's painting Yorkshire. I think they're more interested in the actual painting than where it is. It's traditional isn't it? Oil paint on canvas.

These exchanges demonstrate that at points in the research encounters particular works by Hockney were less significant than Hockney as artist. Hockney as prestigious, cosmopolitan, international artist, named in the local vernacular as a 'lad' who has chosen to depict images of their homeland in the north was important. Respondents articulated feelings of shame about the north and enlisting their agency to the idea of Hockney as artist and his body of work transformed the reputation of the place in which they live to one in which they could take pride.

### **More-than-representational-engagements**

Writing about Hockney's landscapes must inevitably focus on the symbolic representation of place and its links to mentalities about place and identity, but relatively recent work in media studies transports the focus away from the paintings themselves as the centre of attention. In what follows I attend to the way in which people move, place themselves, sense and emote around Hockney's pieces in the spaces in which they are encountered. I draw on the work of scholars who, in building links with human geography in their approach to media and place advocate 'non-media-centric' analysis.<sup>40</sup> Writers such as Shaun Moores and David Morley argue that the field has privileged 'cognition-and-representation', at the expense of allowing the spatial and temporal dimensions of social life to be part of our way of understanding how mediated forms are interwoven in to the fabric of everyday life. Perhaps more positively termed 'more-than-representational', Hayden Lorimer suggests this approach is characterized by, 'thinking through locally formative interventions in the world'.<sup>41</sup> In such an approach the analyst shines light on:

how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions.<sup>42</sup>

Advocating phenomenologically informed research, Moores recommends that such a move attends to the ways in which visual images, not simply those depicting place, are negotiated amidst sensuous, 'everyday doings'. Moores suggests that, 'it is also important to see how meanings can emerge *from* routine practices, through our embodied and sensuous engagements with lived-in environments'.<sup>43</sup> Place is more than location: it is experiential and becomes layered by impromptu, at times unthinking, habitual action. In Tuan's (1977) account of how a house acquires the status of 'home' for example, it does so by peoples' complex, negotiated bodily movement past pieces of furniture and is done so habitually, day in, day out. In this way, walking the corridors and pathways of the home acquires what Tuan calls a 'density of meaning'.<sup>44</sup> As a result, such spaces of the home become 'place'. In the research encounters I had with my respondents, some of the people of the study spoke about the experience of having Hockney's work in the contours of their living spaces and detailed how they lived and moved alongside those works. This is not to deny the role

symbolic images play in forming mental representations in relation to our experience of the world, rather it is to combine it with that idea that attending to how we inhabit, move, sense and orientate our embodied selves through environments where we encounter art enriches our understanding of how people engage with it. For as Lorimer argues, to use 'representationalism' alone, using social constructionist critique, we tend to flatten and render inert the lively, mobile, meaningful and animate practices people bring to the art they value.<sup>45</sup>

Essential parts of the embodied self are the emotions people experience as they practice engagement with art about place. Writers working within 'emotional geographies',<sup>46</sup> argue that specific places summon or evoke particular affective responses. As Mick Smith argues: 'the natural world does *mean* something to me. Springs do in some sense 'speak' to me, they affect me, move me, altering my understanding of my relations to my surrounding environment.'<sup>47</sup> The recognition of sensuous affective knowledge through experience, as Smith argues, is as crucial as linguistic and visual forms of understanding. 'There are so many texts and contexts where we would have to say someone has not understood the situation if they failed to be *moved* to tears, anger, laughter, to feel shocked or appalled, if they were not moved, physically, gut-wrenchingly, heart-stoppingly, emotionally.'<sup>48</sup> Indeed, 'to experience place,' Cameron Duff asserts, 'is to be *affected by place*.'<sup>49</sup> I want to attend to the 'felt and affective dimensions'<sup>50</sup> encased in people's responses to art works which depict place. Here I attend to places of engagement: the gallery and the home.

Existing scholarship has provided some commentary on the role of art in people's lived environments. Philip Pacey (1984) tells how objects and ephemera in the family home become over-layered with memory, belonging and meaning; the role of 'family art' is to affirm attachments between members in a place uniquely known as home. Colin Painter's work on what Constable's landscapes mean to a group of people who are from 'Constable Country', looks at their appreciation of Constable imagery on functional domestic objects such as place mats, wall coverings, cushions. When art is fastened to objects habitually used by people, there is a sense of the art (and this extends to art which is not just about place) existing in the warm familiarity of the domestic environment, such that some people feel comfortable about making it meaningful. As an art student told Painter:

I visited Christchurch Mansion and saw paintings I had only seen in books but that experience left me somewhat cold because the paintings were guarded, removed and distanced from the viewer – destroying the feeling of them being personal objects like the ones I'd eaten off and touched in books.<sup>51</sup>

While Painter shows photographs of the people he spoke to with photographs in their homes next to their own accounts of why the reproductions of Constable's work matter, his work provides no detail about the intricate ways in which art is stitched into the habitual, everyday movements and practices within the spatial setting of people's daily routines. By

talking in one-to-one contexts with respondents, here I unearth a glimpse of the local ecology of reception in which these multi-valent responses were captured to show how people make invested, intimate and material relationships with paintings of places that matter.

### **Feeling, Sensing and Knowing: Embodied responses to Hockney**

If this article has argued that Hockney's art works transformed the reputation of the place where they live, this section evidences the ways that peoples' experience of themselves as embodied, feeling persons undergoes transformation as they engaged with the works in particular settings. Interviews with my respondents forayed into the spaces and places in which Hockney's landscapes were consumed. Experiencing these paintings involved engaging a host of embodied, sensorial practices: vision, perception, cognition, emotional sensation and movement. In these ways, peoples' engagements in galleries and the home showed the different ways in which experiential and sensory relations with images of place also go beyond the representational.

Three of my respondents had made the trip to see *The Bigger Picture* exhibition at the RCA. This space prompted powerful emotions, propelling a visible affective response, some of which was recounted and re-experienced in the one-to-one interview encounters. Sharon recounted the ways in which her face was affected by it:

I remember standing in front of something and just being amazed, that was Hockney and part of *A Bigger Picture*. Before that I'd never really stood there, mouth agape. It was really good. Fantastic. I'd never seen anything like it before. I went to a Warhol exhibition in Brisbane. But it wasn't as big as this. The Hockney thing – in every room, the pictures were made especially to fill out the spaces. They were dominating everything.

Rachel, who is originally from Birmingham but who now lives in Leeds, told me that she went to the exhibition with her Yorkshire-born daughter, whose natal relationship with Yorkshire prompted an especially emotive response: 'we've had family drives on and across the Wolds to the seaside. There was a particular room where there's a lot of paintings of that road across... Anyway she burst in to tears.' Jo talked about Hockney's, 'technical skill and capacity to work in so many different sorts of intimacies whether it is with charcoal or paint.' In what follows her engagement with Hockney is both a perceptual and emotional response:

What is that attachment to the north? And then I was thinking about Turner's paintings and Hockney coming back here after being all around the place. And then I remembered the mammoth day in London where I saw the Hockney and the Lucien Freud. And I walked in to the second gallery where it had his iPad drawing and I just cried. I could cry now [making a sign with her hand in

the shape of a claw and twisting it in front of her stomach]. I just thought they were absolutely – the mark-making and the colour was just absolutely stunning. And I met a colleague here and she said, “So proud he is from up North, aren’t you?” and I thought I am strangely. That’s it’s something about he’s depicting a part of the world that I hold so dear.

Here one can see that respondents’ earlier knowledge and memory of place are pulled up and inserted into the present recollection of the art experience. Here Jo mobilises her connection with the cultural politics of the place-image of the North as well as her own biographical memories of the North to produce an affective embodied response to Hockney’s iPad landscapes. James Elkins argues in his book *Pictures and Tears* that while some tears are produced for a clear reason, some of the tears experienced about art, ‘don’t make sense’: people are not always able to articulate why they are crying. Sometimes tears, as an embodied response, proceed thought. Indeed, Elkins argues that the mystery surrounding unknown crying should be respected.<sup>52</sup> How the body felt in particular places where Hockney was experienced was an important theme. Some people mentioned their bodily unease at being in a gallery. David expressed discomfort about Salts Mill:

I don’t really like it no. I don’t think I’m particularly comfortable in a gallery or art setting. I just find it, I don’t know how to behave in there. I don’t see the art as something I can connect to in that sort of way. And I know Salts Mill is far more laid back than a stand up gallery might be but I just somehow don’t quite get that connection with his work. I mean it’s brilliant seeing it and knowing it’s original. I can take all that in. Maybe it’s the staff there, maybe it’s the aura of it’s a gallery.

Indeed for both David and a host of my other respondents, being in possession of a Hockney framed print which has a place in the home is a favoured way of engaging with his work, which he called ‘that feeling’. David went on to tell me that he owns prints of *The Road through Sledmere* and *The Road Across the Wolds* which are hung in his lounge and dining room. He went on:

We’ve got that one as a big one in the living room. It’s funny actually because we were only talking about this this weekend. And just thinking, sometimes as you do with pictures on the wall, some days you just don’t look at them, they’re just in the background. But I’m glad that it’s there because we’re all connected to it – Dad, my daughter, it’s a place that matters to us all and it’s part of the furniture. It’s like a family picture, where everybody’s looking at it, to get something out of it.



David told me that looking at a print of his at home, 'on my wall somehow gives me more of that feeling than in a gallery'. And Sula spoke of the role that her Hockney reproduction (a print from *Midsummer: East Yorkshire*, watercolour series, 2004) played in creating a particular kind of atmosphere at weekends with her partner in the mornings in her kitchen:

We have this one above our dining table in the kitchen. It's nice because on a Saturday we'll make coffee with the mocha pot and read the *Guardian*. I'll usually sit facing that picture. I don't always look at it with any concentration or even see it half of the time, but it's good to know that it's there. It reminds me of a trip to Driffield we had last autumn. I glance at it sometimes as I'm going past and it takes me back. But on a weekend that Hockney is part of the atmosphere of relaxation, on Saturdays when time stretches ahead and the smell of coffee and the bits of news, cooking and fashion in the colour supplements of the paper.

In these ways, Hockney's images of place, which are proudly significant, are inter-woven into the practical, embodied knowledges required for orientation around the home.

Indeed my respondents consumed Hockney's work through coffee table or art books – David first came across Hockney through a book his mother had shown him as a child. And one respondent told me that a Hockney print had pride of place in her recently purchased new home, 'I've painted my lounge purple. And the purple in the roads match the colour. I'm not sure whether that was conscious, but certainly, when I got my frame home - it's a big frame - it was quite a bonus that it matched my alcove'. In this sense, some of Hockney's pieces became involved in the practice of curation, such that reproductions are chosen to fit with the style of the house. Respondents also talked about the ways Hockney's work triggered a sensuous response. Claudia talked of thinking about other senses as she described feeling 'immersed' in one of the works. In this excerpt, she moves from thinking about the work to thinking about place, her father and the imagined way in which Hockney's painting becomes aromatic:

You sort of feel you're there for yourself - like you're in the middle of a path. You feel immersed in it. I really like the bright colours and there are so many colours. I think this is the one my dad has. It's nice how it's just so big, and that it reminds me of being at home, because there's so much. Fields and fields. It makes me think of farmy smells. This is the sort of place where my dad has grown up - it's so very evocative for both of us.

## **Conclusion**

The starting point of engagement with art is often commonly assumed to emerge from looking at artworks. In some cases it did begin with Hockney's landscapes to produce a chain of participation in a longer process. However, Gell's framework enabled the data to be

drawn out in ways that contradict that assumption. My interviews traced how respondents talked about their engagement in ways which show that it was fluid and difficult to pin down. It flowed from and moved in all directions: from the artworks; from Hockney as artist to the artwork; from knowledge, memory and experience of place to the artwork depicting place; from the contagious interest of a loved one who had a history of engaging with Hockney's work to another loved one to the artwork; from cultural knowledge about the North to Hockney as art personality; from biographical memories of place to the artwork and so on. Indeed, I would argue that engagement has no clear identifiable source; rather these are formations or circuits of engagement that are not exhaustive. Indeed perhaps it is only possible to note that: 'agency is located in a variety of places, people and objects.'<sup>53</sup>

Engagements with Hockney contained, in some cases, powerful thoughts and feelings. Hockney's role was one of cultural ambassador for a North, which in popular mentalities, stubbornly persists as the underdog to the South. Taking the northern landscape to the high annals of the metropolitan centre of the contemporary British art scene was, as David described it, 'sticking two fingers up' to a London elite. It was also making images of the northern countryside in Britain internationally important. The places Hockney had chosen to represent in this collection were deeply significant, the fact that Hockney was known by most of the respondents as a once ostentatious, hedonistic figure of art, made his prodigal 'return' matter profoundly; it acted to doubly validate a place held dear by the people of the study. Engaging with Hockney acted to transform the sense of place in which the people live or are from.

And it would be a mistake to assume that these evocations were purely at the level of the eye. Some engagements were sensorially embodied, people felt the need to touch the works, to feel with their fingers the impasto of the paint. Some qualities of engaged senses were imaginatively wired; the aromatics of 'farmy smells' evoked by the works. On the whole the gallery mattered rather less, it was the print at home that was given greater importance; it gave a sense of ownership to how people chose to participate with the works. These responses demonstrate a powerful urge in some cases to reclaim Hockney's works as a mode of kinship. For some, the gallery space was marked by a rigid, distant atmosphere because it demanded a disciplining of the body which acted to close down freer, more convivial forms of engagement. There was a will to domesticate the prints of the paintings, to re-claim them into the intimate fabric of the home. Preferred above the original artwork, the reproduced print was more manageable precisely because it could 'rub along' in the mix of unconstrained family life. It could be walked past, glanced at, used to trigger a memory, talked about, studied up close or simply be unnoticed as long as 'it's there'. In several cases prints in the home became 'kin' where the relaxed body, familiar in its surroundings, could engage more authentically with Hockney.

Perhaps Hockney's choice to illuminate the East Wolds, an area so little known both to Yorkshire people and to viewers of landscape across Britain and beyond, is the key to the magic of 'The Bigger Picture.' Would paintings by Hockney of the coast or West Yorkshire urban scenes, or of the Dales have carried the same force at the Royal Academy? Then

perhaps it is the freshness of these hitherto hardly seen new landscapes in our visual and spatial imagination that gives them such powerful force. Hockney's landscapes of a barely considered corner of Yorkshire are giving imaginative voice to, as one respondent claimed, the act of 'making our north'.

### **Biographical note:**

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## **Appendix 1:**

The exhibition catalogue from 'David Hockney: A Bigger Picture' was used as a key visual aid in the semi-structured interviews, which took approximately 40 minutes.

### **Background details**

Respondents were asked to give details about their age, occupation, educational qualifications (including 'arts' education), their place of birth, residence and about the place they would call 'home'.

### **Questions:**

1. How did you develop an interest in David Hockney and his work as an artist?
2. Did you manage to see the exhibition 'David Hockney: A Bigger Picture' at the Royal Academy (January 21 to April 9, 2012)?

3. If so, could you say something about your experience of the exhibition and how you responded to the works you encountered.
4. How do you view/consume/engage with his work? These could be his works shown in galleries, his appearance on television news or documentary about his life and work, print media, radio, websites or online resources?
5. Do you have information in your home in the form of books, postcards, exhibition catalogues, merchandise?
6. And/or prints of his work displayed in your home? If so what do they mean to you and please detail how you engage with them.
6. I'm interested in Hockney's use of landscape in his paintings in the 'Bigger Picture' series. What are your thoughts about them as someone with an interest in his work?
7. What do you think of the way he represents or treats landscape in these works? Composition, use of paint, colour for example ...
8. Hockney is a well-known artist both internationally and in Britain. What does he mean to you as an artist and as a personality?
9. Hockney's work could be described as depicting images of northern landscape. Is that a helpful way of thinking about these works?
10. Does your sense of regional identity – where you are from or where you live – play any part in how you respond to these works?
11. Is there anything else about Hockney or his work that you would like to say?

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Painter, *The Uses of an Artist*, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Brown described Hockney as, 'one of the most recognizable and popular artists active today' in 'David Hockney show will be one of Tate Britain's biggest ever', *Guardianonline*, February, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Raine, 'Riding High', 42.

<sup>4</sup> Searle, 'David Hockney landscapes: The world is not enough'

<sup>5</sup> *The Late Review* (BBC2-), April 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Wollheim, *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* (Coluga Pictures, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> *The Art Newspaper*, April, 2013,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Neave, 'The Identity of the East Riding of Yorkshire', 189.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

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- <sup>11</sup> Faulkner, 'Dealing with Hockney', 15.  
<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 12.  
<sup>13</sup> Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*.  
<sup>14</sup> Faulkner, 'Dealing with Hockney', 22.  
<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 19.  
<sup>16</sup> Melia, 'Introduction', 5.  
<sup>17</sup> Gayford, *A Bigger Message*, 236.  
<sup>18</sup> See Livingstone, 'The Road Less Travelled'  
<sup>19</sup> See Savage and Miles, *The Re-making of the British Working-Class 1840-1940*.  
<sup>20</sup> Greenhalf, *Salt and Silver*, 119.  
<sup>21</sup> Wheatley, 'Beautiful images in spectacular clarity', 233.  
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>23</sup> Rodan, 'Large, sleek, slim, stylish flat screens', 371.  
<sup>24</sup> Wheatley, 'Beautiful images in spectacular clarity', 236.  
<sup>25</sup> Wolf, 8.  
<sup>26</sup> Shields, 14.  
<sup>27</sup> Moseley, 'It's a Wild Country. Wild ...Passionate ...Strange': *Poldark* and the Place-Image of Cornwall', 233.  
<sup>28</sup> Rosenthal, 274.  
<sup>29</sup> Russell, *Looking North*, 33.  
<sup>30</sup> Kohl, 94.  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 100.  
<sup>32</sup> Sabeti, "'Inspired to Be Creative?'" , 121.  
<sup>33</sup> Gell, 'Art and Agency', 6.  
<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 28.  
<sup>35</sup> Leach, 'Differentiation and Encompassment', 172. See Leach for a finely detailed explanation of the its causal and representational inferences in Gell's notion of the 'abduction of agency'.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>37</sup> Neave, 'The Identity of the East Riding of Yorkshire', 198.  
<sup>38</sup> Rawnsley, 'Constructing the North: space and a sense of place', 3.  
<sup>39</sup> Rawnsley, 'Constructing the North: space and a sense of place', 8.  
<sup>40</sup> Moores, Krajina and Morley, 'Non-media-centric media studies'  
<sup>41</sup> Lorimer, 'Cultural Geography', 84.  
<sup>42</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>43</sup> Moores, 12.  
<sup>44</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 180-2.  
<sup>45</sup> Lorimer, 'Cultural Geography', 84-85.  
<sup>46</sup> Davidson, Joyce, Bondi, Liz and Smith, Mick, *Emotional Geographies*.  
<sup>47</sup> Smith, 222.  
<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 226.  
<sup>49</sup> Duff, 'On the role of affect and practice in the production of place', 881.  
<sup>50</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Painter, *The Uses of an Artist*, 56.  
<sup>52</sup> Elkins, *Pictures and Tears*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> Sabeti, “Inspired to Be Creative?”, 125.